Non-Agentic Civic AI: Connecting Machine Visibility with Expressions of Conscience and Distributed Civic Capacity for Real-World Problem-Solving

(Framed by the Dewey - Lippmann Exchange; Interdisciplinary Committees Introduced)

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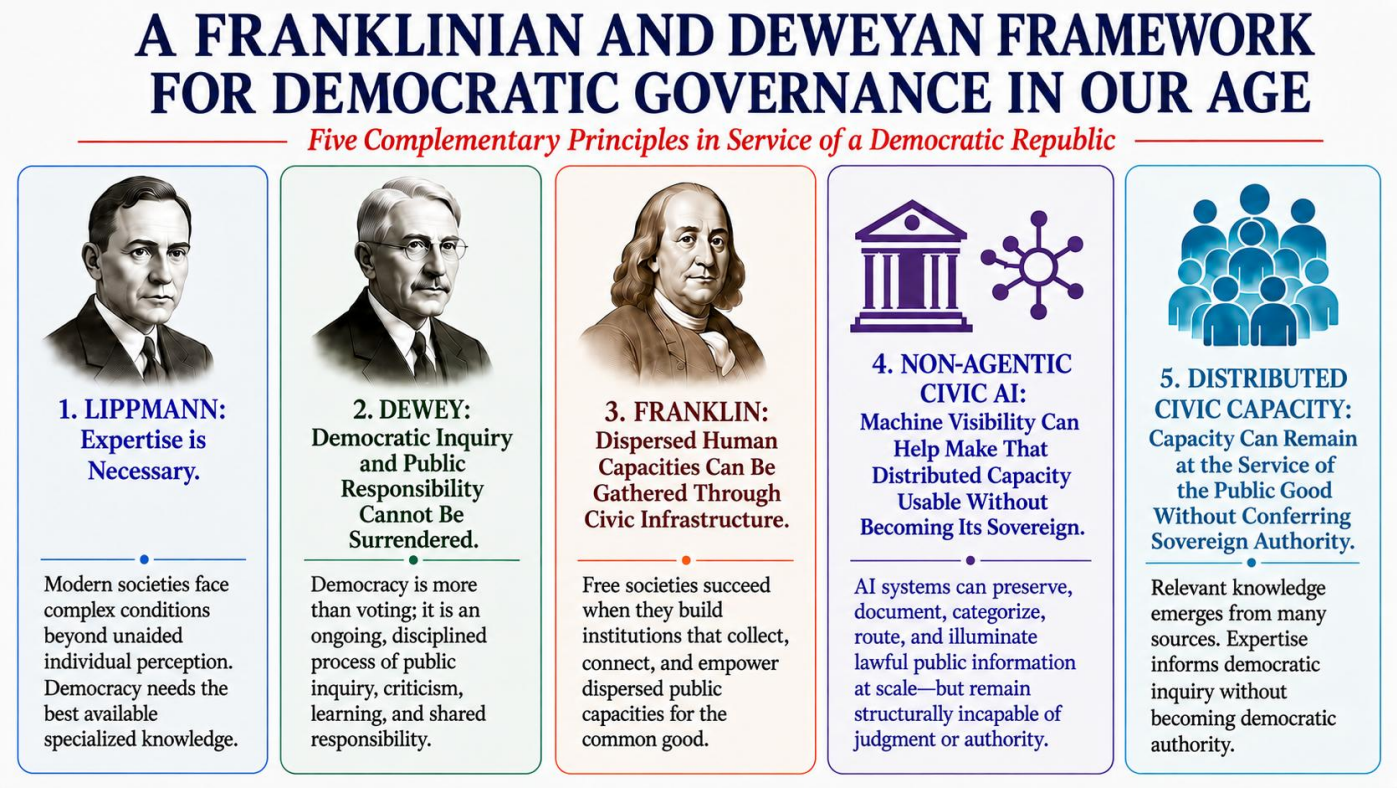
(With the Collaborative Support of ChatGPT, Perplexity, and Gemini/Google)

This two-part work argues that artificial intelligence poses a constitutional challenge not only because machines may make or influence decisions, but because contemporary civic reality increasingly exceeds unaided human perceptual capacity. Framed by the enduring exchange between Walter Lippmann's concern for expertise under conditions of complexity and John Dewey's commitment to public inquiry and democratic responsibility, the work contends that AI intensifies rather than resolves the problem of how free societies can know enough to govern themselves.

Rather than treating AI as an increasingly autonomous decision-maker, the first essay proposes ***Non-Agentic Civic AI*** as rights-bounded public infrastructure designed to extend democratic perception without acquiring democratic authority. It introduces the ***Franklin - Dewey - Citizenry Civic Data Observatory*** as a possible institutional model in which non-agentic systems preserve, structure, categorize, route, and illuminate lawful civic information while remaining constitutionally subordinate to human interpretation, deliberation, judgment, and conscience.

The companion essay then offers a Deweyan and Franklinian - inspired response to Lippmann's concern that modern complexity requires expertise beyond the reach of any individual citizen. It does not reject that concern. Instead, it asks whether expertise must become a centralized intermediary between the public and the civic reality it seeks to understand. The essay proposes ***Distributed Civic Capacity***: the possibility that specialized knowledge, while remaining genuinely expert, can emerge from citizens, professions, institutions, communities, and lived experience; become more visible, accessible, and contestable; and contribute to democratic inquiry and real-world problem-solving without becoming a sovereign authority.



(ESSAY 1 of 2)

DEMOCRACIES CANNOT GOVERN WHAT THEY CANNOT SEE

Lippmann, Dewey, and the Architecture of Non-Agentic Civic AI

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(With the Collaborative Support of Advanced AI - ChatGPT, Perplexity, and Gemini/Google)

Nearly a century ago, democratic philosopher John Dewey and journalist Walter Lippmann dialogued in print one of democracy's enduring questions:

How should free societies respond when public problems become too complex for ordinary citizens to understand?

Artificial intelligence has unexpectedly returned that question to us. Defining constitutional challenge in our era calls us to go beyond asking how intelligent our machines become, and to consider the kinds of civic institutions democracies choose to build. Rather than imagining AI as a future sovereign or autonomous governor, we'll propose here a different possibility: ***Non-Agentic Civic AI*** as public civic infrastructure - powerful enough to illuminate the civic field, yet constitutionally constrained enough to leave judgment, conscience, and democratic authority where they have always belonged - with the citizenry. (***Non-Agentic Civic AI*** may preserve, document, categorize, route, and illuminate lawful civic information. It may not prioritize public concerns, recommend political action, rank human interpretations, or exercise governmental judgment.)

Every generation inherits two responsibilities: to preserve democracy, and to decide what democracy must become in order to survive new technologies.

Nearly a century ago, two American thinkers argued over a question that has quietly returned in our own time. Walter Lippmann and John Dewey were not arguing about computers, algorithms, or artificial intelligence. They were arguing about something more basic and more enduring: What should a democracy do when reality becomes too complex for ordinary citizens to understand?

We'll revisit that debate here - not as a historical curiosity, but as a constitutional question that has become newly urgent in our current age.

Walter Lippmann's Modern Worry

Let us begin with Walter Lippmann.

Mr. Lippmann looked at the industrial world of the early twentieth century and saw something deeply unsettling. Modern life had become vast, interconnected, and technical in ways no nineteenth century theory of democracy had anticipated. Ordinary citizens lived inside what he called "pseudo - environments" - fragments and images of reality - while decisions increasingly required specialized knowledge and complex coordination.

In that world, Lippmann argued, it was unrealistic to imagine that every citizen could understand everything necessary for modern governance. Expertise was not optional. It was inescapable, so the question became how to use it.

If he were speaking to us today, I imagine him saying something like this:

> "You cannot govern a nuclear grid, a global financial system, and a complex health infrastructure simply by asking everyone to read the morning paper. Modern societies depend upon detailed, technical knowledge. If we now have systems that can analyze millions of documents, detect hidden relationships, and recommend optimal policies more accurately than exhausted human institutions, why should democracies refuse such assistance? Is it not rational — even responsible — to give greater weight to those who really know?"

Lippmann was not sneering at the public. He was worried for it. He saw complexity outpacing ordinary understanding, and he feared that democracy, in its traditional form, might not survive.

For many readers, that worry remains recognizable. It is not difficult to imagine the appeal of a more managed, expert-led democracy when the world feels overwhelming.

That is precisely why Lippmann must be allowed to make the best possible case.

John Dewey's Democratic Reply

John Dewey's answer did not deny Lippmann's diagnosis. It challenged his remedy.

Dewey agreed that modern life had become extraordinarily complex. He agreed that expertise had a legitimate and necessary role. But he believed that something essential to democracy would be lost if complexity were addressed by quietly transferring judgment away from the public.

Where Lippmann saw the limits of ordinary citizens as a reason to elevate expert governance, Dewey saw those limits as a reason to transform democratic institutions.

His reply might sound like this:

> "You are right to worry that the world has become too complicated for citizens to understand. But if citizens cannot presently govern themselves well, the solution is not to relieve them of that responsibility. The solution is to build better institutions of public inquiry, education, and communication - institutions through which the public can learn, deliberate, and act intelligently together."

For Dewey, democracy was not merely a method of choosing leaders. It was a way of doing social intelligence - a form of organized inquiry carried out by the public itself. Schools, newspapers, associations, town meetings, experiments in policy, and public debate were all parts of this democratic intelligence network.

The key difference between Lippmann and Dewey was not whether complexity was real. They agreed that it was. Their disagreement was about where democratic capacity should grow.

Lippmann leaned toward concentrating effective judgment in expert systems.

Dewey insisted that democracy must respond to complexity by enlarging the intelligence of the public, not diminishing its responsibility.

Their debate did not end with a clear victor. It simply faded into the background of the twentieth century, unresolved.

But now this old debate seems to have returned in a new form.

The Twenty-First-Century Reveal

The year is no longer 1927. It is almost 2027.

Our world is, in many respects, even more complex than Lippmann's. Global supply chains, climate systems, digital platforms, algorithmic markets, and vast administrative states are intertwined in ways that few individuals can fully grasp.

And we now have something neither Lippmann nor Dewey could have imagined: machine systems that call themselves "intelligent."

They can read in seconds what would take human analysts months. They trace patterns across millions of records. They generate recommendations, risk scores, rankings, and optimized pathways. They promise to help governments "do more with less," "modernize workflows," and "optimize decisions."

In other words, they offer governments exactly the kind of assistance Lippmann once imagined experts might provide - only at machine speed.

This brings us to what I consider one of the defining constitutional temptations of our own age: to confuse optimizing government with strengthening democracy. They are not the same project.

It is easy, under pressure, to treat any improvement in policy efficiency as an improvement in democracy itself, but Dewey would remind us that democracy is not defined by efficiency alone. It is defined by whether the public remains the living source of judgment and inquiry.

Artificial intelligence has not changed Dewey's question. It has simply made his answer far more difficult - and far more important.

From Judgment to Inquiry to Perception

We can now express the problem in a simple chain: Democracy depends upon judgment. Judgment depends upon inquiry. Inquiry depends upon perception. Perception now exceeds unaided human capacity.

Therefore, democracy needs new civic instruments of perception.

This realization reveals two broad - and deeply different - paths for Civic AI in democratic life.

On the one hand, there is what I will call the Lippmann temptation in machine form. As computational complexity grows, governments delegate more analysis and more judgment to machine systems, recommendations become policy, and automated workflows quietly replace deliberative processes.

Over time, human institutions learn to trust, rely upon, and eventually depend upon machine optimization.

The spirit of this trajectory is not necessarily hostile to democracy. It can arise from genuine concern: "The world is too complex. Citizens are too busy. Institutions are overwhelmed. Let experts, now AI systems, take on more of the burden."

But as judgment migrates into increasingly autonomous systems, something Dewey considered essential begins to wither: the public's practice of inquiry, its habit of wrestling with consequences, its responsibility for the meaning of collective choices.

On the other hand, there is a very different path - one much closer to Dewey's instinct.

I will call this path ***Non-Agentic Civic AI***.

In this path, as computational complexity grows:

- Government increases civic visibility.

- Citizens, legislators, courts, journalists, scientists, and communities see more.

- Machine systems structure and illuminate information, but they never inherit sovereign judgment.

Here, Civic AI does not sit at the center of governmental action. It sits at the periphery, as civic infrastructure - a set of non-agentic instruments whose task is to make democratic reality more intelligible without ever deciding what should be done.

Put simply, one path uses Agentic AI to manage democracy from above, while the other uses Civic AI to furnish democracy from below - with better light, better records, better shared understanding.

The constitutional question is not whether democracies will use intelligent machines. They will.

The question is for what purpose.

A New Kind of Public Instrument

The digital civic environment has grown beyond the unaided perceptual capacity of any legislature, court, newsroom, university, or citizenry. No human institution can continuously observe all the processes, records, and anomalies that now shape public life.

Democracy therefore requires a new kind of public instrument - not to think for the people, but to help the people see together.

Throughout history, democracies have repeatedly invented instruments that extend human perception without replacing human judgment. Maps revealed territories, telescopes revealed the heavens, microscopes revealed invisible life, and libraries preserved civilization's memory.

In each case, the instrument collaborated in perception. It did not do the science or the politics. It extended our senses and left interpretation and responsibility to human beings.

Every democracy rests upon a sequence that is both simple and fragile. We cannot deliberate about what we cannot perceive, we cannot judge what we have not first examined, and we cannot govern wisely what we cannot collectively see.

The purpose of ***Non-Agentic Civic AI*** is therefore not to shorten democracy's work, but to make that work possible under conditions of digital complexity. It extends democratic perception into forms of civic complexity that no unaided human institution can continuously observe.

Non-Agentic Civic AI is a powerful collaborator in democratic perception - but never a collaborator in democratic judgment.

"Non-Agentic" as Constitutional Virtue

At this point, we can say something more precise: *Non-Agentic Civic AI* does not demonstrate an absence of capability. It instead shows a disciplined refusal to convert capability into authority. Its restraint is not a technical limitation; it is a constitutional commitment.

We ask a great deal of such a system. It must be powerful enough to illuminate complex digital realities in real time, and humble enough to decline the one power modern technologies most often claim - the power to decide what should happen next.

The more capable ***Non-Agentic Civic AI*** becomes, the more disciplined its constitutional restraint must become. Capability does not justify expanding authority. Greater capability demands greater restraint.

The Franklin - Dewey - Citizenry Civic Data Observatory

To make these ideas concrete, let me describe one proposed institutional answer: the ***Franklin - Dewey - Citizenry Civic Data Observatory.***

Think of it less as a piece of software and more as a building - an observatory built not for stars, but for civic reality. I've proposed that it be built in Washington, DC, as an extension of the non-partisan Library of Congress.

Inside the Observatory, there are two suites. Both operate on a 24/7 schedule.

In one suite, machine systems work. They perceive civic data at scale and record public events, structure information into a small number of shared civic categories, and route records to the proper institutional domains.

Every record that enters the Observatory is sorted into categories designated by its human leadership.

Machine systems may perform only bounded informational functions: preserving records, documenting provenance, categorizing material under human-established rules, disclosing uncertainty, and routing information through transparent procedures.

They never answer: "What matters most?" "What should we do?"

Non-Agentic Civic AI never stands above humans or democracy; it quietly works alongside them in a constitutionally bounded professional civic role - structuring information, surfacing conditions, and insisting that all recommendations, priorities, and decisions stay on the human side of the boundary.

Direct communication with all AI systems outside of the certified ***Non-Agentic Civic AI*** system are structurally disallowed. This system's informational and professional integrity must be beyond reproach to endure our citizenry's partisan divisions over time.

In the other suite, interdisciplinary committees work. They frame meaning and interpret patterns. They weigh trade-offs, deliberate, and decide.

This suite includes six rooms. In each of these rooms, the Observatory's streaming data reports from the ***Non-Agentic Civic AI*** are continually analyzed and debated by interdisciplinary committees, each defined by a constitutional category of democratic concern:

- ***Six Rings*** Conditions - Where are digital invisibility and destabilization accelerating?
(Note: ***Six Rings*** refers to the diagnostic framework, ***Six Rings of Digital Invisibility and Civic Destabilization***.)

- Informational Knowledge (What We Know) - What relevant factual information is clearly established?

- Informational Humility (What We Lack) - Where do information gaps demand we admit uncertainty?

- Historical Orientation - How do past, present, and emerging futures relate?

- Civic Infrastructure Impacts - How would proposed actions reshape human and AI civic systems?

- Rights and Conscience - How might actions affect civil rights and expressions of individual and collective conscience?

The Interdisciplinary Democratic Review Committees

The six Interdisciplinary Democratic Review Committees take up the work. These committees are not bureaucratic subdivisions. They are institutions of democratic cognition.

Democracy is not simply a collection of opinions. It is a disciplined practice of collective thinking. Each committee preserves one vital habit without which democratic intelligence slowly deteriorates:

The ***Six Rings*** Committee protects systemic awareness.

The Informational Knowledge Committee protects shared factual grounding.

The Informational Humility Committee protects epistemic humility.

The Historical Orientation Committee protects democratic memory and continuity toward cross-generational commitments.

The Civic Infrastructure Committee protects long-term structural foresight.

The Rights and Conscience Committee protects liberty and moral legitimacy.

In effect, the committees are demonstrating the process of democratic thought. The walls of their meeting rooms are lined with portraits of Old World democratic leaders, as well as New World luminaries such as Benjamin Franklin and John Dewey.

These committees ensure that even when machine systems illuminate reality, human inquiry remains disciplined, active, and constitutionally structured before any action occurs.

Visibility alone does not produce democratic intelligence. Human inquiry transforms visibility into judgment. Machines may illuminate, but they must never inherit sovereign judgment.

Three Constitutional Guardrails

For such an observatory to remain genuinely non-agentic, three constitutional guardrails must be strictly enforced:

- First: Categorizing for communication must never involve steering for decision. Machine systems may sort information into shared civic categories so that human beings can think together. They may not collapse those categories into prioritized recommendations, ranked urgencies, or optimized action plans.

- Second: Routing authority must never become decision authority. Machine systems may determine where a record belongs - rights, history, infrastructure, knowledge. They may not determine which category deserves attention first, which institution is most important, or what decisions should follow.

- Third: Procedural neutrality must never become optimization. Within each category, records may be ordered only through flat, reproducible procedures: chronology, stable identifiers, statutory classifications. Relevance scores, urgency weights, predictive rankings, and "helpfulness" optimizations are constitutionally forbidden.

In other words, the machine may sort but it may not privilege. This principle was demonstrated in Benjamin Franklin's design of an earlier American civic infrastructure, the colonial mail system which would become the United States Post Office.

To make this vivid, imagine a system that quietly begins ranking which constitutional questions deserve Congress's attention first. That sounds like efficiency, but in reality, it quietly transfers civic priority-setting from elected institutions to software. That is the line we refuse to cross.

These principles prevent optimization logic from quietly reappearing as hidden guidance. They keep machine intelligence permanently on the side of illumination, never on the side of rule.

The Dangers Beyond Machine Overreach

At first glance, the danger of AI in democratic governance seems obvious - that machines might quietly acquire governing power.

But as this Observatory proposal was developed, another danger emerged: even perfectly constrained AI can still produce human intellectual passivity. If citizens and institutions come to believe that the machine "sees everything," they may lose the habit of struggling with reality themselves. Democratic thought can become shallow, episodic, or outsourced.

The Interdisciplinary Democratic Review Committees exist as much to prevent democratic atrophy as to prevent machine overreach.

They insist that the public must keep asking questions, committees must keep examining consequences, and institutions must keep exercising judgment. ***Non-Agentic Civic AI*** does not relieve democracy of its intellectual labor. It supports that labor.

The Historical Thesis

We can now state the larger historical principle at stake. Every civilization eventually invents new public institutions that extend human perception. The constitutional question is whether those institutions faithfully discharge their limited civic and professional duties - or gradually begin exercising authority that belongs only to the people.

The ***Franklin - Dewey - Citizenry Civic Data Observatory*** is one attempt to answer that question in our own century.

It says:

- Yes, we need institutions that extend perception.

- Yes, they may be more capable than any human network at seeing the digital field.

- But their authority must remain limited to perception and structure. Judgment, conscience, and priority must remain permanently human.

Dewey argued that democracy survives only if citizens remain active participants in inquiry - if the public can recognize problems, investigate causes, test solutions, and learn from consequences.

Our century asks whether that philosophy still holds when machines can illuminate reality better than any human institution.

The Observatory offers one answer: Yes, but only if machine intelligence is constitutionally designed to strengthen democratic inquiry rather than replace democratic judgment.

The ***Franklin - Dewey - Citizenry Civic Data Observatory*** is not primarily an institution for governing artificial intelligence. It is an institution for preserving democratic inquiry under conditions of machine intelligence.

Franklin guides its infrastructure. Dewey guides its inquiry. The citizenry guides its meaning. Continuous observance of established democratic principles allows its continued operation.

Artificial intelligence, within this architecture, is a lamp - a non-agentic streetlight that helps everyone see the same civic street. It does not steer traffic, and it does not decide destinations. It simply illuminates.

The Lamp and the Public

Another of Benjamin Franklin's many civic improvements was the design of a better streetlight – a simple instrument that illuminated the world around it.

At its base are the historical principles of democracy - constitutional safeguards, the scar tissue of past human suffering, and the democratic commitments we have inherited. In our time, these foundations are represented by the ***52-Gates Democratic Permissions Threshold -*** the constitutional tests that determine whether any AI system may approach public authority at all.

Rising from that base is a sturdy lamppost - a ***Non-Agentic Civic AI*** infrastructure - designed in Franklin's spirit to support without ruling to illuminate without steering, to assist without deciding.

Running through its interior, in the spirit of John Dewey, is a live current - democratic education, shared inquiry, and the disciplined practice of shared problem-solving.

And at the top is the light itself. That light does not represent Franklin or Dewey. And it certainly does not represent artificial intelligence.

That light represents the one thing none of them can replace: the citizenry's collective conscience – the capacity that must make difficult and consequential decisions in a world of limited resources and shifting needs.

Final Reflection: The Defining Question of the Age of Humanity with AI

We often don't notice our streetlights. We simply discover, after dark, how much we depend on them.

Perhaps civic infrastructure should aspire to the same humility.

When it functions well, it quietly enlarges the freedom of everyone without asking to become the center of attention. That, I believe, is the proper constitutional role of ***Non-Agentic Civic AI***.

Walter Lippmann reminded us that complexity is real. John Dewey reminded us that democracy must answer complexity by enlarging the intelligence of its public rather than diminishing its responsibility.

A century later, artificial intelligence has not settled their debate. It has simply placed it in our hands.

Every civilization eventually invents new public institutions that extend human perception. The constitutional question is whether those institutions faithfully discharge their limited civic and professional duties - or quietly begin exercising authority that belongs only to the people.

Every generation must decide whether new technologies will strengthen the people's capacity for self-government, or gradually render that capacity unnecessary.

The defining constitutional question of our age is not how intelligent our machines become. It is whether our democratic institutions continue enlarging the people's capacity for self-government. or quietly allow that capacity to fade.

Franklin can offer the infrastructure and the routing. Dewey can guide the inquiry. ***Non-Agentic Civic AI*** can clarify our civic digital field.

But the light itself belongs to the citizenry.

Long after each of us has left this world, the citizenry's light will be that which remains.

Perhaps, like John Dewey and Benjamin Franklin, we should not just trust - but structurally protect - that very light.

(ESSAY 2 of 2)

NON-AGENTIC CIVIC AI: PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE to SUPPORT DISTRIBUTED CIVIC EXPERTISE, INQUIRY, and SHARED PROBLEM - SOLVING

(A Deweyan and Franklinian - Inspired Response to Lippmann's Concerns)

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From Centralized Expertise to Distributed Civic Capacity

The preceding essay argued that democracies require new instruments of perception. We now consider how democratic societies can responsibly use the expertise required to understand what they see.

Walter Lippmann's enduring concern remains important: modern democratic life can become too complex for ordinary citizens to understand unaided. No citizen can master the specialized knowledge required to understand every public problem, and democracy cannot afford to treat disciplined expertise as merely another form of opinion. The question, therefore, is not whether democracy needs expertise. It does. The deeper question is whether expertise must become a centralized intermediary between the public and the civic world it seeks to understand.

John Dewey offered a different democratic instinct. He did not deny complexity or the legitimate role of expertise. He insisted instead that democratic society must preserve the public's capacity for inquiry, communication, learning, and shared problem-solving.

Earlier, in 1800s America, Benjamin Franklin had already demonstrated how structured institutions could gather dispersed human capacities into practical civic capacity. His work reflected a commitment to building institutions through which knowledge, resources, and voluntary effort could become useful to a wider community.

Neither Franklin nor Dewey could have fully anticipated contemporary digital systems. Yet together they invite a question for our own time: **Can democratic society make better use of the knowledge distributed throughout its people and institutions without transferring democratic authority to either experts or machines?**

This essay proposes ***Distributed Civic Capacity*** as one possible answer. It does not suggest that everyone must become an expert, nor that all opinions become equally authoritative. It means that useful knowledge is widely dispersed and cannot always be identified in advance.

Non-Agentic Civic AI can support this capacity without becoming its source or sovereign. It can help make lawful civic conditions more visible, preserve records and provenance, disclose uncertainty, structure information, and make relevant evidence more accessible and contestable. It can create better conditions for independent human expertise to discover, investigate, challenge, and learn from shared civic problems.
(It may preserve, document, categorize, route, and illuminate lawful civic information, but may not prioritize public concerns, recommend political action, rank human interpretations, or exercise governmental judgment.)

The proposal therefore places ***Non-Agentic Civic AI*** within a much older democratic tradition. Libraries preserve knowledge and archives preserve memory. Maps reveal relationships, and public records make governmental action inspectable. Schools sustain civic learning, while voluntary associations gather dispersed human capacities. ***Non-Agentic Civic AI*** can extend this civic infrastructure into an increasingly complex digital environment - not by replacing human expertise and judgment, but by helping a democratic society see more of the knowledge it already possesses.

The goal is not to make the machine the expert. It is to make human expertise more visible, more accessible, more contestable, and more capable of contributing to democratic inquiry - while leaving interpretation, priority, authority, and action on the human side of the constitutional boundary.

Memory, Visibility, and Civic Continuity

Democracy depends upon more than elections, laws, and offices. It also depends upon memory: the public records through which a people can learn what has happened, identify what remains unresolved, understand what it has inherited, and recognize what it owes to those who will follow.

Human beings have repeatedly built institutions to preserve collective memory and extend collective perception. Libraries preserve knowledge beyond a single lifetime, and archives protect records beyond a single administration. Maps make territories, systems, and relationships visible. Museums preserve cultural evidence. Postal systems and newspapers have helped people separated by geography participate in a shared civic world.

Digital networks do not abolish these older civic functions; they extend their reach, speed, connective capacity, and potential scale.

They also introduce serious dangers: manipulation, surveillance, propaganda, unequal access, fragmentation, and systems of hidden preference.

The constitutional task, therefore, is not to celebrate technology as such. It is to determine what kinds of civic infrastructure democracies should build, what powers that infrastructure may exercise, and what powers it must permanently refuse.

In recent years, the modern democracy of Ukraine has made these stakes painfully concrete. During the full-scale Russian invasion, digital public-service systems helped displaced people retain access to documents and services despite physical destruction. Humanitarian and civic networks used digital tools to document damage, identify needs, and sustain civilian continuity. Archivists, librarians, museum workers, programmers, scholars, and volunteers across many countries also worked to

preserve vulnerable Ukrainian cultural websites, digital collections, and historical materials. Citizens and cultural-heritage workers used accessible tools to create digital records of monuments, places, and objects whose physical survival could not be assumed.

This is not an argument for a new instrument of military intelligence. It illustrates a civilian and historical possibility: when a shared civic reality becomes visible, accessible, and preservable, distributed human capacities may gather around a public need. People with different skills, locations, experiences, and affiliations can voluntarily contribute to preserving records, establishing facts, protecting memory, and sustaining civic continuity.

The same principle extends beyond wartime preservation. A community may possess relevant knowledge that no single institution possesses in full. One person may have direct experience; another may have technical expertise; another may possess historical knowledge; another may recognize a pattern across cases. Their knowledge may remain isolated unless the conditions exist for them to encounter a shared body of evidence and recognize its significance for a common civic problem.

Non-Agentic Civic AI can help strengthen those conditions. It may preserve lawful records, establish provenance, structure information, expose uncertainty, and make relevant civic evidence more visible and accessible. But it does not decide which human knowledge matters most or organize people around a preferred conclusion. Its contribution is infrastructural: to help a democratic society retain and illuminate the materials from which distributed human inquiry may emerge.

A people's history is not a decorative background to democratic life. It is part of the evidence by which a citizenry knows who it has been, what it has endured, what it has learned, and what obligations it carries forward. Memory makes inquiry possible across generations; visibility makes distributed inquiry possible across communities. Both are forms of civic continuity.

Lippmann's Concern, Dewey's Test

The preceding essay, *Democracies Cannot Govern What They Cannot See*, argued that modern democracy requires new instruments of perception. This essay takes the next step. **If democracy can see more, how can it make responsible use of the expertise required to understand what it sees?**

That question brings us back to Walter Lippmann.

Lippmann's concern remains serious and unavoidable. Modern societies are genuinely complex. No individual citizen can master public finance, energy systems, epidemiology, cybersecurity, constitutional law, transportation networks, environmental conditions, historical evidence, and the many other domains that shape public consequence. A democracy that treats disciplined knowledge as no different from unexamined opinion does not become more democratic. It becomes less capable of recognizing reality.

Lippmann was right: disciplined expertise is indispensable.

The question, then, is not whether democracy needs expertise. It does. The question is whether expertise must become a centralized intermediary between the public and the world it seeks to understand. **Must complex knowledge be concentrated within an insulated apparatus that increasingly mediates reality for everyone else? Or can democratic society create conditions in which specialized knowledge emerges in many places, communicates publicly, is challenged by evidence, corrects itself, and contributes to collective judgment without becoming a new sovereign class?**

Here the distinction between distributed expertise and distributed authority becomes essential.

Distributed Civic Capacity does not mean that everyone becomes an expert, that all opinions become equally authoritative, or that professional knowledge loses its value. It means that useful knowledge is often dispersed across citizens, professions, institutions, communities, and lived experience - and that democratic society need not know in advance where all relevant knowledge will be found.

This is where John Dewey provides a demanding democratic test. Dewey did not deny complexity or the legitimate role of expertise. His concern was whether democratic institutions could remain capable of inquiry, communication, education, criticism, experimentation, and learning rather than relieving the public of responsibility for its common life.

The test for contemporary civic technology therefore becomes more precise: Does it enlarge the public's capacity to inquire, or does it quietly make that capacity unnecessary?

Non-Agentic Civic AI can meet that test only by remaining subordinate to the human purposes that inquiry serves. It may help preserve records, establish provenance, structure information, disclose uncertainty, and illuminate relationships within a complex civic field. It may make relevant evidence more visible and accessible to independent human investigators. But it may not decide which expertise deserves authority, determine which public problem matters most, select preferred interpretations, or direct political action.

This is a Deweyan-inspired response to Lippmann's concern. It does not claim that Dewey designed, anticipated, or endorsed a twenty-first-century Civic AI system. He did not. It asks instead whether his commitments to public inquiry, communication, education, criticism, and democratic responsibility can help us distinguish a technology that strengthens the conditions of democratic intelligence from one that gradually substitutes for it.

The aim here is not to choose Dewey against Lippmann. It is to take Lippmann's problem seriously while refusing the assumption that the only alternative to uninformed mass opinion is concentrated expertise. ***Distributed Civic Capacity*** offers another possibility: specialized knowledge can remain genuinely expert while becoming more dispersed, visible, contestable, and available to democratic inquiry.

Franklin, Dewey, and Civic Capacity

Franklin supplies a second historical resource for this argument. He did not invent voluntary association, and he did not treat civic action as a substitute for public institutions. Yet he repeatedly demonstrated how dispersed human capacities could be gathered into practical institutions of public benefit. His Library Company, Union Fire Company, hospital initiatives, learned societies, and other projects helped convert scattered books, money, labor, tools, knowledge, and local experience into durable civic capacity.

Franklin's importance is not that he personally controlled every institution he helped create. It lies in a civic habit: recognizing that capacities which appear small and isolated can become consequential when people build structures through which they can contribute to common purposes. The Junto and related enterprises illustrate a culture of inquiry, mutual improvement, shared responsibility, and practical association.

Dewey contributes a different but complementary civic discipline. Gathering capacity is not enough. Collective action must remain capable of inquiry, communication, criticism, experimentation, and learning. A public must be able to identify consequences it shares, investigate their causes, compare possible responses, learn from outcomes, and revise its understanding. Otherwise collective capacity can harden into faction, habit, ideology, or unexamined administrative routine.

The two traditions therefore complement one another:

Benjamin Franklin helped American democracy gather voluntary civic capacity, and John Dewey helped our democracy learn. ***Non-Agentic Civic AI*** could help today's democracy see.

Here, "see" does not mean that the machine supplies democratic understanding. It means that non-agentic civic infrastructure can help preserve, structure, and illuminate the conditions from which human understanding may emerge.

The internet has already shown that people separated by geography and profession can contribute to common tasks with extraordinary speed and scale. But voluntary online activity alone is not sufficient civic infrastructure. A democratic republic also needs durable public systems that can make the civic field visible, comprehensible, historically grounded, and available under constitutional safeguards.

Such infrastructure need not gather citizens into a single organization or appoint a central body of experts. Its value may lie precisely in allowing people who possess different forms of knowledge to remain independent while gaining better access to a shared field of evidence. Franklin helps us see the value of gathering dispersed capacity, while Dewey reminds us that gathered capacity must remain capable of inquiry. *Non-Agentic Civic AI* can help make the conditions for both more visible without directing either.

Distributed Civic Capacity

Non-Agentic Civic AI is proposed as a form of public infrastructure that does not solve the expertise problem by becoming the expert. It changes the conditions under which expertise may emerge, encounter evidence, and contribute to democratic inquiry.

Its contribution is limited but potentially important. It may preserve lawful civic records; document sources and provenance; maintain stable categories; link relevant material; disclose uncertainty; preserve correction histories; and make civic conditions visible through reproducible procedures. It may perform these functions only within legitimate democratic rights, privacy protections, and security constraints.

This distinction reflects what public infrastructure is for. ***Non-Agentic Civic AI*** should not tell citizens what to build or direct them toward a preferred civic response. It should make available more usable civic materials: reliable records, preserved histories, clear provenance, stable categories, accessible evidence, and a shared field of visibility. **When these materials are available, people independently motivated to address a public condition may choose for themselves to investigate, associate, criticize, compare evidence, and develop possible responses.**

The system may have an architecture, but it has no political purpose of its own. Its purpose is to make lawful civic information useful, reliable, well documented, traceable, and as complete as practicable. It provides resources for inquiry; it does not supply civic purpose.

A richer palette offers a useful analogy. A palette does not paint the picture, choose its subject, or judge its meaning - but it enlarges what the artist can distinguish and express. In the same way, a more visible and well-structured civic field may enlarge what citizens and experts can perceive, investigate, and imagine. The system does not paint the civic future. Human beings remain responsible for what they make of what they can see.

Of the People, By the People, For the People:
Voluntary Civic Portability and Personal Civic Decision

Distributed Civic Capacity does not mean that every citizen must become an expert in every civic field. Nor does it require citizens to adopt a permanent civic identity, remain within one voluntary association, or devote themselves continuously to a single public concern.

A citizen may regularly support a local animal-welfare organization, neighborhood association, food pantry, historical society, school activity, or other voluntary civic effort. That same citizen may later encounter a different civic concern - a hurricane, infrastructure failure, housing emergency, environmental threat, public-health need, or humanitarian crisis - and wonder whether some part of his or her existing capacity might be useful there.

Often, the obstacle is not indifference. It is unfamiliarity.

The citizen may reasonably think: "I care about this civic need, but I'm not sure that I know enough to help responsibly."

This is the ***Voluntary Civic Portability Challenge***. Citizens may possess transferable time, practical skills, occupational experience, local knowledge, organizational ability, communication capacity, material resources, generosity, curiosity, or willingness to learn. Yet these capacities can be difficult to carry from one civic domain into another because the informational threshold for entering an unfamiliar field may be substantial.

Non-Agentic Civic AI may help lower that threshold without directing the citizen toward a preferred civic purpose.

When a citizen independently initiates an inquiry, the system may provide ***Civic AI-Illuminated Civic Options and Resources***: relevant, source-visible descriptions of civic conditions; publicly available organizational information; historical and local context; learning materials; participation requirements; eligibility and safety conditions; official contacts; available forms of assistance; unresolved questions; and uncertainties that remain.

The system may respond to the citizen's own inquiry and to capacities, limitations, interests, or availability that the citizen voluntarily chooses to disclose. It may package relevant information in a form that makes an unfamiliar civic field more intelligible. It may help a citizen understand what pathways for further inquiry, learning, or independently chosen voluntary participation are publicly available.

It may not, however, decide what the citizen ought to care about. It may not select a civic cause, assign a duty, rank public needs, recommend participation, recruit volunteers, identify preferred persons for a task, validate readiness, endorse an organization, guarantee safety, or imply that a citizen's involvement will produce a particular outcome.

The constitutional sequence therefore remains human-led:

Civic Concern → Voluntary Human Inquiry → Civic AI Illumination → Civic Options and Resources → Personal Civic Decision → Voluntary Action or Non-Action

The ***Personal Civic Decision*** is indeed personal. After considering the information made visible, the citizen alone may decide whether to inquire further, seek human guidance, pursue training, join an association, contribute resources, act through an appropriate organization, defer participation, redirect attention to another concern, or take no action at all.

Each remains a legitimate exercise of civic freedom.

The purpose of this infrastructure is not to convert civic concern into measurable participation, optimize citizen engagement, or produce a predetermined volume of volunteer activity. Its purpose is more modest: to ensure that a citizen whose conscience has independently turned toward a civic need is not unnecessarily prevented from learning about that need by avoidable informational obscurity.

Illumination Is Not Authorization

This distinction becomes especially important in high-risk settings such as disaster response.

Non-Agentic Civic AI may illuminate authoritative registration procedures, training requirements, supervision arrangements, safety constraints, eligibility conditions, and responsible organizations. It may identify what those organizations publicly require of prospective participants.

It may not authorize participation, certify competence, waive an organization's requirements, guarantee safety, or substitute its informational output for accountable human supervision.

The citizen's ***Personal Civic Decision*** therefore remains bounded by the legitimate requirements and responsibilities of the human organization or institution through which participation occurs.

The distinction also clarifies the system's constitutional role. ***Civic AI-Illuminated Civic Options and Resources*** are possibilities made visible, not recommendations issued. The system does not create a preferred civic destination for the citizen. It responds to an inquiry that the citizen has already initiated.

The Citizenry Wing of the Observatory

This function gives concrete meaning to the Citizenry dimension of the ***Franklin – Dewey - Citizenry Civic Data Observatory***.

The interdisciplinary expert committees established within the Observatory serve a different purpose. They provide specialized, interdisciplinary human expertise and review. They help examine complex civic conditions through disciplined knowledge, evidence, professional experience, and critical inquiry.

The citizenry wing is not a simplified version of those committees. It does not ask ordinary citizens to become substitute experts. It provides a voluntary civic foothold for citizens themselves.

The distinction matters because the Observatory is intended to draw upon both forms of democratic capacity. Experts contribute specialized knowledge, while citizens contribute lived experience, local knowledge, practical abilities, time, curiosity, moral concern, voluntary effort, and the capacity to recognize needs that may not yet be fully visible within institutional systems.

The Observatory cannot perform properly without the contributions of both citizens and interdisciplinary panel experts.

To citizens, the invitation is not to become an expert before you participate. It is to bring what you have, learn what you need to know, and decide for yourself whether and how you can contribute.

A citizen may move among civic concerns without acquiring credentialed expertise in each one. The Humane Society volunteer may explore hurricane recovery. The elementary school teacher may investigate an adult literacy need. The retired engineer may examine a neighborhood infrastructure problem. A person who knows little about a newly emerging concern may simply ask to understand it better.

The citizen may subsequently act, defer, redirect, continue an existing affiliation, investigate further, or do nothing.

That freedom is not an incidental feature of the system. It is the point.

Franklin's contribution to this vision is the recognition that dispersed human capacities can become consequential when civic infrastructure makes voluntary contribution possible. Dewey's contribution is the insistence that democratic capacity must remain capable of inquiry, communication, learning, criticism, and revision.

Non-Agentic Civic AI adds a contemporary digital function: illumination. It can help citizens see unfamiliar civic terrain without telling them where they ought to go.

The governing relationship is therefore: Citizens carry civic capacity. Civic AI illuminates civic options and resources. Citizens make ***Personal Civic Decisions***.

This is not an AI-powered system of civic mobilization. It is public learning infrastructure for a free citizenry.

The machine illuminates the landscape while the citizen decides whether to enter it and, if so, where, when, and how.

Distributed Expertise, Not Distributed Authority

The central proposal is not that everyone becomes an expert, nor that all opinions become equally authoritative. It is that useful knowledge is widely dispersed and cannot always be identified in advance.

A local resident may know something an agency misses. An engineer may recognize a structural failure. A journalist may discover a contradiction. A historian may identify a recurrence. A disability advocate may see an exclusion hidden by administrative averages. A statistician may find an anomaly. A constitutional scholar may recognize a rights problem. A disciplined public field can make it more possible for such knowledge to encounter a visible civic condition.

But distributed expertise is not distributed authority. Experts may investigate, interpret, criticize, or recommend. They may agree or disagree. They may be correct, incomplete, partisan, or mistaken. Expertise alone does not confer sovereign authority.

Public authority remains with the citizenry and with constitutionally authorized democratic institutions. ***Distributed Civic Capacity*** therefore requires neither a central bureau of approved experts nor a machine that decides whose knowledge deserves attention.

Human contributors may disclose methods, sources, evidence, uncertainty, revision histories, and conflicts of interest. Competing claims may show the records and reasoning upon which they rely. Human institutions may publish analyses, findings, dissents, and corrections.

Non-Agentic Civic AI, however, must not calculate universal credibility scores, rank civic groups by worthiness, optimize attention toward favored interpretations, or convert procedural metadata into political preference. It may make information more accessible without turning accessibility into endorsement.

The machine may sort, but it may not privilege.

That boundary is essential. The purpose of distributed expertise is not to replace centralized authority with distributed authority. It is to allow more human knowledge to enter democratic inquiry while preserving the constitutional location of judgment.

The Principle of Civically Detached Non-Agentic Civic AI Support

Non-Agentic Civic AI must remain detached from the independent civic inquiry it may help make possible.

It may make lawful civic evidence publicly visible and procedurally accessible, but it shall neither adopt the purposes of independent parties nor participate in their conclusions. It may illuminate the field of democratic inquiry; it may not join the contest for political direction. This is the ***Principle of Civically Detached Non-Agentic Civic AI Support***.

Non-Agentic Civic AI is not a think tank, policy institute, advocacy organization, expert consortium, political party, coordinating center for civic movements, or public debate hall. Such bodies may legitimately investigate, interpret, persuade, organize, criticize, and advocate, but ***Non-Agentic Civic AI*** must not become one of them.

It may make civic information available to independent civic associations, but it may not incorporate, direct, endorse, or privilege those associations. It may not sponsor inquiry groups, choose preferred experts, coordinate campaigns, recommend policy, or prioritize societal problems.

The value of independent civic capacity lies partly in its freedom, plurality, unpredictability, and separation from the informational infrastructure that helps make its work possible. When ***Non-Agentic Civic AI*** makes a civic condition visible, citizens, journalists, research groups, professional associations, scholars, neighborhood organizations, and other voluntary groups may freely decide whether to investigate it. The system does not appoint their delegates, direct their work, or admit them as constituent elements of its own analytical structure.

Non-Agentic Civic AI can support everyone without affiliating with anyone.

This distinction protects both the Commons and independent civic life. ***Non-Agentic Civic AI*** can provide a common evidentiary field. Independent civic actors may investigate that field, and democratic institutions may deliberate and decide.

The ***Principle of Civically Detached Non-Agentic Civic AI Support*** does not indicate civic indifference. It indicates civic support without civic direction.

Constitutional Design Note: Two AI Pathways

The difference between Agentic AI and ***Non-Agentic Civic AI*** is not principally a difference of computational capability. It is a difference in constitutional sequence.

An agentic pathway can carry machine perception and analysis forward toward interpretation, priority-setting, recommendation, planning, and action or execution. Human oversight may remain at particular points in that process, but the system's operative logic moves toward determining what should happen next. ***Non-Agentic Civic AI*** follows a fundamentally different constitutional pathway.

Non-Agentic Civic AI Design Pathway: Collective Conscience: Civic Concern → Human Inquiry → Machine Visibility → Distributed Civic Capacity → Democratic Deliberation → Collective Conscience: Judgment and Priority-Setting → Human Action → Continuous Democratic Learning, Accountability, and Resolution from Real-World Consequences

What the pathway establishes:

Conscience begins the process by recognizing a shared civic concern; the machine does not decide what a democracy ought to care about.

Human Inquiry frames the question, determines what must be investigated, and directs machine visibility toward an already humanly recognized concern.

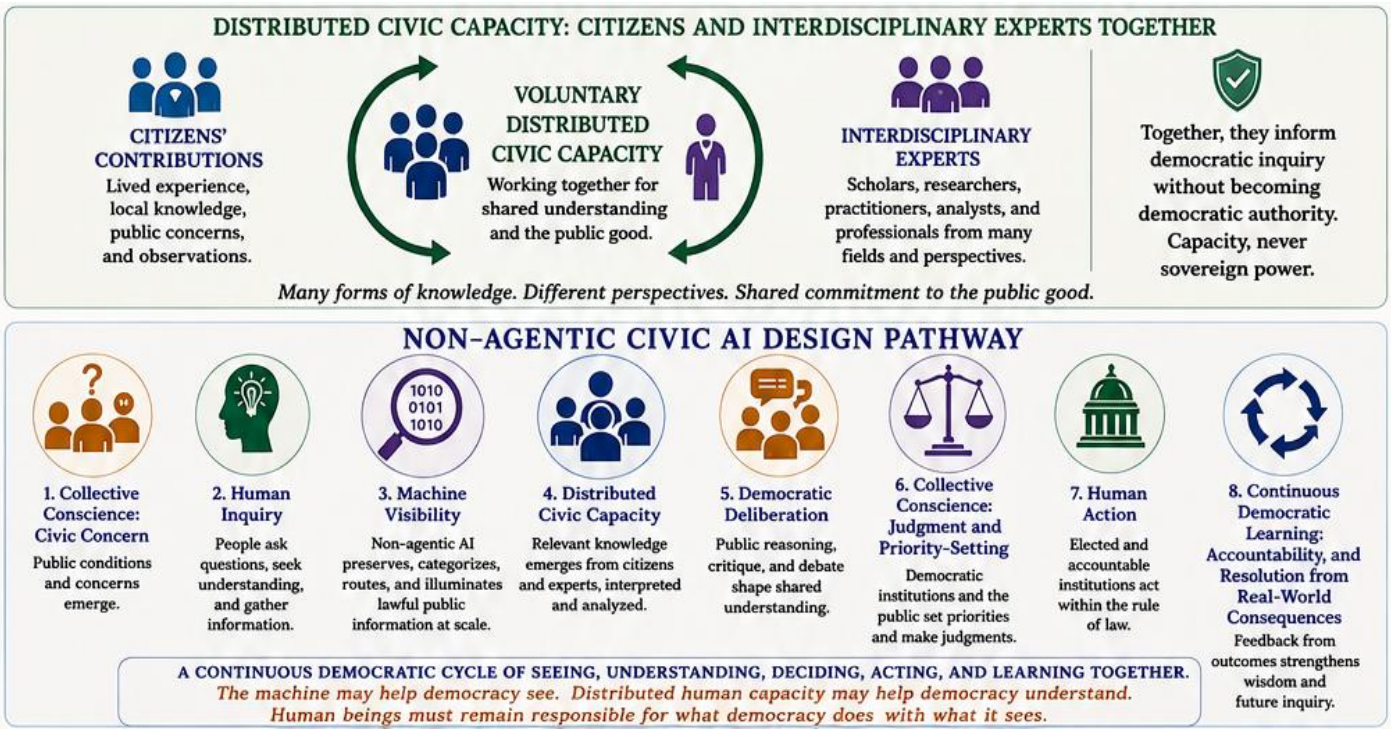
Machine Visibility supports inquiry by preserving, structuring, categorizing, documenting, and illuminating lawful civic evidence without supplying authoritative meaning or direction.

Distributed Civic Capacity interprets and tests the visible field through independent human knowledge, evidence, criticism, and experience.

Democratic Deliberation and **Collective Conscience** together then weigh evidence and alternatives amidst competing needs and limited resources.

Human Action ensures that lawful democratic institutions, rather than software, act.

Continuous Democratic Learning, Accountability, and Resolution return consequences to public attention - creating the conditions for renewed civic concern and a new cycle of inquiry.



A Civilian Instrument: The Light and the Citizenry

This proposal requires a bright boundary against militarization. The digital systems of authorized military, intelligence and law enforcement agencies will use Agentic AI for command, surveillance, targeting, strategic advantage, and organized harm, but those are not authorized functions of ***Non-Agentic Civic AI***.

Non-Agentic Civic AI **is designed to illuminate the civic field, not the battlefield. Its purpose is to support the civilian conditions of democratic continuity: historical memory, accessible public records, rights, humanitarian visibility, infrastructure awareness, public accountability, and the public capacity to understand shared conditions before crises become irreversible.**

This boundary must be structural, not merely rhetorical. Authorized categories, access protections, non-prioritization rules, human oversight, public auditability, and the refusal of autonomous recommendation must keep ***Non-Agentic Civic AI*** on the side of civic illumination. The system should not be built as civic infrastructure capable of quietly migrating into an instrument of optimized coercion.

The Ukrainian preservation efforts discussed earlier clarify what is at stake. When archives, websites, monuments, libraries, museums, and records are threatened, preserving them protects more than objects. It protects a people's ability to remember itself, establish facts, recover rights, mourn loss, and carry its history forward.

A democracy should not wait for catastrophe to recognize that public memory, civic records, and historical orientation are vital infrastructure.

Respecting Mr. Lippmann's Concerns

The argument of this essay should not be mistaken for a dismissal of Walter Lippmann. His concerns remain serious. The question is whether they require the concentration of expertise and judgment that he feared - or whether new civic infrastructure can help democracy respond to those concerns while preserving public responsibility.

Mr. Lippmann was concerned that ordinary citizens cannot possibly know enough to understand the complexity of modern public life. He was right. No citizen can personally master every specialized system upon which a modern society depends. Democratic life requires knowledge far beyond the capacity of any individual to acquire alone.

In reply: ***Distributed Civic Capacity*** does not ask every citizen to become an expert. It asks whether a democracy can make better use of the expertise already distributed throughout its people, professions, institutions, and communities. ***Non-Agentic Civic AI*** can help make relevant civic conditions and evidence more visible, accessible, and contestable, allowing people with specialized knowledge to contribute without requiring every citizen to possess that knowledge personally. The citizen need not know everything individually if democratic society can become better at making its dispersed knowledge available to itself.

Mr. Lippmann was concerned that citizens encounter public reality through incomplete and sometimes distorted pictures of a world too large and complex to experience directly. This concern cannot simply be solved by giving citizens more information. More information can itself produce confusion, manipulation, fragmentation, or new forms of distortion.

In reply: ***Non-Agentic Civic AI*** should not manufacture a single authoritative picture of civic reality. It can instead help preserve provenance, disclose uncertainty, retain relevant evidence, make corrections visible, and allow competing interpretations to remain distinguishable. Its purpose is not to tell citizens which picture is true, but to help create a richer and more contestable evidentiary field from which human inquiry can proceed. The answer to distorted perception is therefore not machine certainty. It is better conditions for human inquiry.

Mr. Lippmann was concerned that modern government requires specialized expertise that ordinary citizens cannot personally supply. A democracy cannot responsibly govern complex energy systems, public health, transportation networks, financial systems, environmental conditions, constitutional questions, or other specialized domains through uninformed opinion alone. Expertise is not the enemy of democracy; it is one of the conditions democracy needs in order to recognize reality.

In reply: Expertise need not become centralized authority. ***Distributed Civic Capacity*** does not flatten distinctions between knowledge and opinion. It does not declare every perspective equally reliable. It does not diminish professional competence. It instead asks whether specialized knowledge can remain genuinely expert while becoming more visible, more accessible, more contestable, and more capable of contributing to public inquiry. Distributed expertise is not distributed authority. Experts may investigate, interpret, criticize, and recommend. They may agree or disagree. They may be right, incomplete, partisan, or mistaken. Their expertise may be indispensable without becoming sovereign. Mr. Lippmann was concerned that democratic decision-makers need disciplined knowledge and fact-finding rather than raw public opinion alone. This concern also deserves respect. Democratic judgment cannot rest upon assertion merely because assertion is popular. Public institutions require evidence, disciplined inquiry, professional knowledge, and the capacity to distinguish what is established from what remains uncertain.

In reply: The alternative to raw opinion need not be a single expert intermediary standing between the public and reality. Independent experts can investigate a shared civic field. Researchers can compare evidence. Journalists can expose contradictions. Historians can provide orientation. Engineers can identify technical conditions. Scientists can test claims. Citizens with lived experience can reveal consequences invisible within administrative averages. Professional associations, universities, voluntary organizations, and public institutions can contribute their own forms of disciplined knowledge.

Non-Agentic Civic AI can help make the underlying civic field sufficiently visible for these forms of expertise to encounter the same conditions, investigate them independently, challenge one another, and contribute to democratic understanding.

It need not decide which expert is correct. It need not rank which conclusion deserves political attention. It need not become the bureau through which all legitimate knowledge must pass. It can support the conditions of fact-finding without becoming the authority that governs its conclusions.

A Different Answer to an Enduring Problem

Lippmann's concerns remain with us. ***Distributed Civic Capacity***, expressly supported by ***Non-Agentic Civic AI***, does not dissolve them. It answers them differently.

It does not pretend that citizens can know everything. It does not pretend that expertise is unnecessary. It does not pretend that distributed inquiry will always produce wisdom. It does not pretend that disagreement can be eliminated.

Instead, it proposes that democracy can become more capable of using the knowledge already distributed throughout its people without creating a new class of sovereign experts - or a new class of sovereign machines.

The Light and the Citizenry

Distributed Civic Capacity does not solve every problem of democratic knowledge. It cannot guarantee that the right people will appear, that evidence will be interpreted correctly, that citizens will act wisely, or that democratic institutions will always deserve trust. Distributed inquiry can produce misinformation, duplication, factionalism, poor methodology, or ideological capture as well as insight.

Its claim is more modest and more constitutional.

A society that cannot see shared conditions cannot responsibly inquire about them. A society that cannot preserve its records cannot learn from them. A public cut off from the conditions of expertise becomes increasingly dependent upon those who claim to see on its behalf. And a system that invisibly ranks what matters can become a quiet substitute for democratic priority-setting.

The alternative is not to ask *Non-Agentic Civic AI* to solve these problems. It is to create better conditions in which human beings can address them.

Non-Agentic Civic AI may make civic reality more visible without claiming to settle its meaning. It may help independent expertise gather around a shared condition without appointing expertise as sovereign. It may preserve disagreement without treating disagreement as failure. It may equip democratic institutions with a richer field of evidence while leaving lawful authority where it belongs.

Non-Agentic Civic AI contributes a strictly limited contemporary function: it helps democracy see. Independent human expertise may gather around what becomes visible.

Human beings inquire, compare, criticize, learn, and solve problems together. Democratic institutions deliberate and decide. But the light itself remains with the citizenry.

The machine does not become the expert. The expert does not become the sovereign. ***Non-Agentic Civic AI*** does not become the political actor. The citizenry remains responsible for what the light reveals.

Lippmann gives us the complexity problem: expertise is necessary. Dewey gives us the democratic obligation: public responsibility must not be surrendered.

Franklin gives us the civic-infrastructural instinct: practical institutions through which people may do more together should be built and maintained by the public—not corporations.

Non-Agentic Civic AI offers a contemporary instrument for holding these insights together: make more of the civic field visible, while leaving expertise, inquiry, judgment, conscience, priority, and authority on the human side of the boundary. Expertise may be distributed without authority being distributed. By designing AI that is technologically capable of mapping out digital complexity (satisfying Lippmann's need for clarity) but structurally barred from making policy decisions or taking actions (satisfying Dewey's requirement for human-driven public inquiry), democracy can be preserved.

Perhaps the enduring philosophies of John Dewey and Benjamin Franklin, along with the emerging design principles of today's ***Non-Agentic Civic AI*** might all agree:

When democratic communities confront problems at scale, none of us is smarter than all of us.